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Agenda Item 4B: Strengthening humanitarian-development cooperation in forced displacement situations

Madam Chair, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased to introduce the conference room paper entitled "Humanitarian-development cooperation in forced displacement situations". I will be brief and speak less to the text of the conference document that has been issued and more to some of the key concerns that underpin it.

The subject matter, of course, needs no real introduction. It has been a constant preoccupation of UNHCR for almost five decades. Indeed, addressing the Forty-third session of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission (ECOSOC), in Geneva on 1 August 1967 UNHCR's fourth High Commissioner Sadruddin Aga Khan said of the refugee situation in Africa:

"arriving as they frequently do in large numbers, the refugees can at first represent a heavy burden for the country of asylum, but they can also become a great asset to their new country provided they can be included in the constructive work of development, rather than being allowed to remain in idleness in camps at the expense of the international community."

In November of that same year, addressing the third committee of the UN General Assembly, the High Commissioner referred to his conviction that *"the solution of refugee problems is linked with the problem of economic and social development as a whole."*

It would be tempting to draw the conclusion that little progress has been achieved in this area since that time. With global displacement at its highest level for several decades, with protracted refugee situations becoming more the rule than the exception, and with solutions proving seemingly ever more elusive, the prospects for successfully resolving forced displacement challenges appear daunting.

Yet perhaps a little perspective is required. The 65 million figure for the number of persons forcibly displaced from their homes accounts for around 1% of the global population. Refugees represent an even smaller fraction of this figure. In quantitative terms, therefore, the problem of forced displacement should be eminently manageable. What makes resolving refugee situations so intractable is its coincidence with the fragility, conflict and violence that impedes solutions and condemns too many refugees to life on the margins.

More positively, since 1990 global development indicators have improved markedly. The number of people living in absolute poverty has been reduced dramatically. A greater proportion of the human population is leading healthier and wealthier lives than ever before. At the same time, it is widely acknowledged that bringing the remaining 10 % - including almost all the refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) - into the development mainstream will represent a qualitatively different challenge.

Ensuring that we “leave no-one behind” as envisaged under the 2030 Agenda means in large measure addressing the coincidence of the world’s poorest people with its most complex conflicts. By 2030, it is projected that over 70% of the global absolute poor will be in conflict and violence affected states. In many ways the inter-related character of many of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) speak directly to this state fragility agenda - ending poverty and fighting inequality, promoting safe and peaceful societies and strong institutions, and growth through strong, inclusive and transformative economies.

Not surprisingly, therefore, concerns over peace, security and conflict resolution have featured strongly in the present Secretary General’s priorities. Delegates will be familiar with the ongoing reflections on the addition of peace to the humanitarian-development cooperation rubric and the associated discussions on reform within the United Nations (UN) system agencies. Such processes augur promisingly for the more integrated approach required to resolve contemporary conflicts and to address their consequences.

Madam Chair,

I should like to elaborate briefly on the three main components of the conference room paper on “*Strengthening humanitarian-development cooperation in forced displacement situations*”, namely policy development, partnerships, and operationalization.

The basis of sound **policy development** is the collection of reliable data and the consequent production of evidence. For too long, policy orientations on refugee have been based more on conjecture than fact. This can mostly be attributed to the difficulty of obtaining reliable information in volatile and unstable circumstance within which most humanitarian interventions occur. It is also linked to the fact that few states include refugees within national statistical and registration processes. Yet in most post emergency refugee situations, it is possible to conduct analytical work that throws light on to the socio-economic circumstances of refugees and local communities. The conference room document highlights a number of these studies.

By combining the on-site knowledge and insights of humanitarian agencies with the methodological and analytical rigour of development organizations, greater and more precise insights into the socio-economic consequences of displacement for both refugees and local communities are generated. It is our expectation that further and more systematic investment in this critical area of humanitarian-development cooperation will prove increasingly valuable to the design and effectiveness of interventions throughout the programme management cycle.

More importantly, the real value added of analytical work is its contribution to informing policy dialogue. This is the area where the engagement of development organizations and their inter-action with states can play a potentially transformative role. By addressing refugee situations as socio-economic development challenges rather than purely humanitarian issues, the substance of policy dialogue can focus greater attention on how best to transform displacement situations into development opportunities for refugees and host communities alike.

Partnerships have always been central to the delivery of UNHCR's responsibilities under its mandate. Sadruddin Aga Khan's speech alluded to earlier made extensive reference to the need to partner with development organizations to facilitate solutions for refugees. This is a recognition not only of the need for support in implementation but also of where UNHCR's comparative advantage as a humanitarian organization focused on protection principally reside. Unlike some international NGOs, for example, who are able to move seamlessly between emergency and development modes, UNHCR's mandate and operational footprint is grounded firmly in the humanitarian sphere. This makes the development of partnerships with others better equipped

to take on long term challenges all the more critical. But it clearly does not preclude us from learning how we can interface and interact more efficiently.

One of the most evident signs of progress in Forced Displacement is the disappearance of the linear model of relief to development. It is now widely accepted that humanitarian and development agencies should operate together rather than in series. In UNHCR's history, there are good examples of where humanitarian and development organizations have worked successfully – sometimes together, sometimes in parallel - in supporting the return and reintegration of refugee populations, mostly notably in Central America and South East Asia in the 1990s. There are fewer examples of successful collaboration in refugee situations, often due to policy and legal inhibitions associated with the use of development financing for citizens of another country.

The coincidence of poverty and displacement, and its spill-over consequences, has lent further impetus to the greater interest and engagement of other development partners, most notably the multi-lateral development banks. Funding from the MDBs for humanitarian assistance – in interventions that spanned risk reduction to reconstruction – reached US\$ 994 million – in 2015, an overall increase of 65%.

In UNHCR's view this is a most promising evolution. It brings the prospect of greater expertise and engagement to bear, particularly in terms of large scale capital investments, public-private partnerships and the role of the private sector. It is also a strong signal that traditional barriers to the use of development finance in displacement situations can be overcome. And, last but not least, the prospect of substantial and predictable financing from development partners holds out the promise of reallocating resources to UNHCR's core protection mandate.

If UNHCR's work occasionally takes on a development character, it is primarily a reflection of the under-served nature of the locations, often in remote border areas, where refugees arrive. Offering services to both refugees and local communities – often where none existed previously – is a pre-requisite for ensuring social cohesion. Sustaining such solidarity over the longer term is beyond the remit of humanitarian agencies. It is precisely in addressing such issues where partnerships between states, development organizations and

humanitarian agencies can yield the most important returns on our respective investments.

Looking both to the present and the future, UNHCR is actively engaged in transforming the humanitarian-development nexus into action on the ground. Our main focus will be on the Comprehensive Refugee Response (CRRF) which provides the over-arching framework within which our efforts will be rolled out in the years to come.

As many delegates will be aware, the 3RP initiative has effectively acted as a pre-cursor to the CRRF. In addressing the consequences of the Syrian crisis for the neighbouring countries, it has provided valuable experience and introduced new instruments and innovation to the mounting of more comprehensive, longer term responses to a refugee crisis.

There is much to draw upon in guiding future interventions, particularly with respect to the value of investing time and effort in analytical work as the foundation of sound policy dialogue, effective delivery arrangements, and well-designed programmes.

In activating the partnerships and initiatives with development partners outlined in the conference documents, UNHCR will seek to build on the good practices we have identified to date and those we are presently acquiring. As has often been observed, an appropriately trained and motivated work force is the most critical enabler of progress in all public and private sector initiatives.

Cooperation between humanitarian and development operators is no exception. Investment in human resource development to equip UNHCR with the knowledge and expertise it requires to service these partnerships will be a priority in the years to come.

In conclusion, whilst there are many reasons to be anxious over the scale and complexity of contemporary refugee situations, both new and protracted, UNHCR sees significant potential for collective efforts to make progress in improving the dignity and lives of both refugees and affected local populations in the years to come. We look forward to sharing our knowledge and field-craft with development partners and to cooperating on joint initiatives that we are convinced will bring greater predictability and improvements to the lives of the poorest and most marginalized.